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THE ULSTER GUARD AT GETTYSBURG ON THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF JULY, 1863.

Verses Read by the author,

HENRY ABBEY,

October 4th, 1888, at the Dedication of the Battlefield Monument to the Twentieth Regiment of New York State Militia, Eightieth New York Volunteers.

RONDOUT, NEW YORK. Second Edition. 1891.

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THE ULSTER GUARD AT GETTYSBURG.

The First Day.

HIGH-HEARTED with many successes, and never so strong as then,
Lee marched into Pennsylvania with his hundred thousand men.
But the Army of the Potomac caught up betimes with his van,
And at Gettysburg fronted invasion valiantly, man for man.

Then the splendid Eightieth Regiment of New York Volunteers,
Named "The Ulster Guard" for their county—may it never lack their peers!
Tho' last of the Federal army to strike their Virginia tents,
Were first to arrive at Gettysburg and ~~promptly~~ first to wage its defense.

Save that Buford's cavalry only, had
come on the day before;
And the Ulster Guard, as they double-
quicked, could hear the far-off roar
Of the horsemen's guns, as they thun-
dered to hold the coveted ground;
For eagle-eyed general Pleasanton the
vantage place had found.

He had given the duty to Buford hereon
to make a stand,
And Buford repeated to Devin, a colonel
in his command,
That here must be fought the battle, and
he feared that it would begin
Ere the infantry could assist him, for the
scouts were driven in.

But Devin, who doubted the rebels in
positive strength were near,
Said that he would "take care of any
who might at his front appear."
"You will not!" said Buford, "for ear-
ly to-morrow they will attack,
And we shall do well, Tom Devin, if we
are not soon driven back.

"For the enemy then will come booming—his skirmishers three deep."
So boded the chevalier Buford, and turned him to warless sleep;
But he spoke to his signal-captain, reminding him of his trust,
Saying, "Look out to-night for camp-fires, and in the morning for dust."

There was dust enough in the morning, and lines of camp-fires that night;
And Buford and Devin, a-saddle, were early forth for the fight.
The enemy's van was at them. And where was our army delayed?
In a belfry stood gallant Buford, and watched for the northern aid.

The dust of the First Corp's coming was a trailing, glorious cloud.
The full, red disk on the banners was a sun-like symbol and proud.
The blue-coated succor and rescue marched up the Emmitsburg road
And across the swale where, not knowing, Stevens Run peacefully flowed.

Welcome, magnificent, thrilling was the
spectacle to behold,
As the ranks, at double-quick moving
throu' the harvest's swaying gold,
Swept up Oak Ridge and deployed there,
on the crest, in battle array,
Their arms and accouterments gleaming
in the July light of day.

When Rowley's brigade reach'd the ridge
that is west of Willoughby Run,
In a sheltering wood they halted; their
wearisome march was done.
But in Hagerstown road, which rudely
of quietude was bereft,
They, at once, formed line of battle, with
the Ulster Guard on the left.

Then the prompt brigade, by the right
flank, in solid column advanced
Throu' the wood and the fields beyond
it, where yellow butterflies danced,
Toward Gettysburg, to the ridge-slope
that is east of Willoughby Run,
Where they formed new line of battle,
with their backs to the mounting sun.

But ordered over the ridge-top and into
the valley below,
There the rifle missives were pinging,
and there were who got their woe.
Beyond, in a grain field, swarmed hor-
nets, sharp-shooters plying their trade.
So, back to their place on the ridge-
slope, discretion sent the brigade.

They had been to the spot where Rey-
nolds, their great corps com'ander, fell.
And Doubleday, of their division, now
served in his stead right well.
They had Biddle in place of Rowley, for
the hour its needs creates,
And the Federal left wing, this day,
fought under our colonel Gates.

Across from that left, nearly westward,
stood a dwelling-house of brick
And farm buildings other, not distant
from where the foemen were thick.
From the buildings our captain Bald-
win, after a spirited fight,
Drove the enemy, took possession and
checked and harried their right.

Then Cunningham daringly followed, to
give brave Baldwin his aid,
And, for two hours, they and their sol-
diers the left flank cover'd and stayed.
This deed of a handful excited the grow-
ing enemy 's ire ;
He partly surrounded the buildings, the
smaller of which took fire.

The companies lost their defenses, and
presently they were seen
Retreating under the cover of cavalry
and a ravine. . . .
The fear that is felt by the soldier ere
the first few shots are fired,
By the Ulster Guard was forgotten ; for
they fought as if inspired.

The enemy 's musketry rattle and dread
artillery roar
Made ever a louder minute than the one
that thundered before,
As fresh, impetuous foemen arrived on
the furious field,
And their batteries quickly unlimber 'd
and into action wheeled.

Their division of Rodes arriving on Oak Hill's summit, was seen
Overlooking the uplands southward and the basking meads between.
On the crest they planted their cannons, and with shot and shell they cleft
The ranks of Federal soldiers, from the right to the utmost left.

As the sickle of pest, for ravage, was this reaping enfilade ;
To retire from its range in order, the Federal troops essayed.
By the left flank, Biddle retreated, the Hagerstown road to try,
Supporting the cannons of Cooper, which to Oak Hill made reply.

The Federal line was bow-shaped, the apex on Chambersburg road,
The left on Hagerstown highway, and, where Rock Creek trippingly flowed,
On the north of Gettysburg rested the dexter end of the bow ;
For the bow was bent backward strongly, as if to shoot at the foe.

But where was the arrow, the army, that
should straightway pierce his heart?
The bow was soon palpably broken, or
broken, at best, in part.
Too great was the strain for endurance,
and the strain each moment grew.
For what could four scant divisions,
with Lee 's veteran great odds, do?

When Ewell 's Corps, formerly Jack-
son 's, had entered the clashing field,
They meant that the Federal forces
should presently die, or yield.
There were thirty and five armed thou-
sands with this savage, warlike will,
Slave-holders and proud work-scorners,
and for being that, fiercer still.

But, fewer than half their number were
the blue in battle array
Round Gettysburg, northward and west-
ward, on that first, unequal day.
They were cool, effective fighters, and
the enemy sadly found
That the price, was his heart 's red cur-
rent, for each rival inch of ground.

But the westering sun drooped hapless
when long, deep, closely formed lines
Of gray-coated infantry, moving as
pawns in their player's designs,
Began the advance; and behind them
came strong reserves, and the fight
Blazed loud; but the Union's defenders
broke at the center and right.

Then Gettysburg groaned and was crowd-
ed and chok'd with fright that had fled.
The rebels, hotly pursuing, fed havoc
on murderous bread.
The town was streeted with slaughter,
and even in alley and lane
Was the thud of the leaden summons
and the cry of deadly pain.

But the First Corps had not waver'd, and
strove to recover the day,
Tho' a half of the Union forces was scat-
tered, as leaves, away.
Yet the left of the line was holden by
Biddle's superb brgade,
And Cooper's four, deep-throated war-
dogs were loud with their iron aid.

On the left of these baying creatures, the Ulster Guard, true and tried,
Stood under their fluttering colors—their starry, bullet-torn pride.
They held their strong, morning position, eastward of Willoughby Run,
On the ridge; but a darkling onset in the distance had begun.

For a cloud of troops, a division, from the tempest's bounds afar
In the west and south, hasted forward in powerful lines of war.
Awaiting the grim adventure with calmness not void of delight,
Stood the Ulster Guard in their prowess, undauntable in the fight.

As the enemy came from the cover of woods, where he had formed,
With a torrent of screaming missiles his regular ranks were stormed.
Our infantry fire lightened sharply, our guns were cleverly served;
But the living took slain men's places, and the ranks came on unswerved.

They came in their might, and outflanking Gates's intrepid command,
Fired oblique, destructive vollies, which madness might scarcely withstand;
But our soldiers knew they were fighting, on their own, free, northern ground,
For their homes, their country, and all things that in these birthrights abound.

And their zeal and enthusiasm were their very light and breath;
Each soldier did valorous actions and smiled on wounds and on death.
Tho' the dead there fell till the living fought from behind them at last,
To the ground our Guard seemed rooted, for they stood unshaken and fast.

Above them the smoke of the conflict heavily lifted and curled,
And the hot sun floated behind it like some fulvid, phantom world,
Toward which, foregone souls were ascending, in sacred columns and slow,
From the pitiless field of slaughter in the real world below.

The mingled thunders of battle shook
widely the valorous ground ;
Not since the hills were heaved upward,
had they felt such ponderous sound.
The sooty air, split with concussions,
bore bruit of the fight afar,
And hurried the long, forced marches to
this suck and whirlpool of war.

The Ulster Guard, fearless and hardy,
outflanked by a whole brigade,
Stayed the whelming wave of onset and
retreated no whit dismayed.
They were last to leave the position and
as they sowly retired,
Often loading, halting and turning, they
on their pursuers fired.

On his horse Gates shouldered the col-
ors (lest, haply, it should be lost)
Till he knew the chance for its capture
was safely weathered and crossed ;
For not far from the Seminary, where a
stone and rail fence stood,
He again formed line with Biddle, at
the edge of a narrow wood.

Here, with five brave batteries near
them, and Meredith on their right,
Assailed by a rebel division, they made
a desperate fight,
Till the enemy fled the carnage, and re-
treated with the sun ;
But to the dank and ghastly valley haunt-
ed by Willoughby Run.

Our forlorn hope saved from destruction
the greater part of their corps,
Whose confused retreat they defended,
and they could not, that day, more.
For the bulk of the Union army they
had helped, with courage grand,
To hold the great, natural bulwarks,
which back of Gettysburg stand.

Thus the Ulster Guard nobly combated,
in open field, eight hours,
'Gainst double and triple their number,
secession 's violent powers.
Then eastward they marched to the bul-
warks where, on a com'anding height,
By the verdant graves of the townsfolk,
they bivouacked for the night.

At midnight the sleeplessly anxious took
heart and rest at a sound—
The advent of Meade and his army on
the rugged, rising ground.
The orderly footsteps of thousands, the
iron trample of steeds,
And the rumble of guns and caissons,
made music for loyal needs.

The Second Day.

On the second day of the battle the Ul-
ster Guard was arrayed
With a Pennsylvania regiment — a spe-
cial demi-brigade,
Whom colonel Gates took the command
of—and if one regiment durst,
The other durst more ; none braver than
that Hundred and Fifty-first.

Not till afternoon did the rebels begin
their flanking attack,
And the demi-brigade went forward
when Sickles was driven back.
So they helped to check the invader,
and when the darkness divine
Closed the terrible strife, they were post-
ed centrally in the line.

In the whistling forefront of battle stood
firm the demi-brigade,
And a fence of rails, which was near
them, they changed to a barricade.
What the shield was to the crusader, this
was to them in the fight,
And behind it they lay on their muskets
throughout that sullen night.

O Night! on the battle-field tarry; thou
truce, two armed days between.
The troops asleep in their blankets, and
sentinels dimly are seen.
The hands of Darkness and Silence are
over the mouths of the guns,
And, in dreamland, dove-like are hom-
ing our country's bivouacked sons.

Yonder, stretcher-bearers go laden ; here
runs a trench for the dead ;
Hark ! moans of wounded and dying,
and the caw of hunger o'erhead.
Oh! what shall eventful to-morrow bring
forth for the soldier brave ?
Shall he be the hero and idol, or rest in
a nameless grave ?

The Third Day.

At noon, on the third day, the prelude
to Pickett's wild charge began—
A dirge, by the guns of rebellion, for the
Lost Cause and its ban ;
And the Ulster Guard's covert station, it
fatefully so befell,
Was swept by a hideous tempest of shot
and exploding shell.

Unknown in their sharpest warfare was
the like to these men of ours ;
Full a hundred bellowing cannons play-
ed on them for nigh two hours.
The firing was constant and deaf'ning,
the ground was harrowed amain ;
But, by their barricade shielded, a few
men only were slain.

When the cannonade had subsided,
Pickett 's division began
To deboush from the woods and orchard,
where their strong right-center ran.
With shouldered arms, with their battle-
yell, and at double-quick, they came,
Devoted, that brave eighteen thousand,
to death and immortal fame.

The charge moved apace through the
open ; the militant ocean of men
Surged inland in three awful billows,
submerging meadow and glen.
The steel was as water that sparkled, the
standards as flying spume,
And the roar of guns was the breaking
on irrevocable doom.

When Pickett's men entered the valley
in front of the Ulster Guard,
That Guard opened fire on them brisk-
ly. Did this their approach retard?
Into one their three waves melted as they
marched by the left oblique;
Then they all to the right faced quickly,
to strike where our line seemed weak.

Throu' their solid, advancing column,
great, horrible rents were plowed;
Yet the ranks closed up in a moment,
and came on, fearless and proud.
But angrily toward them converging, the
daring demi-brigade
Moved down like a storm-cloud, and
met them with a deadly fusilade.

There rested the left wing of Hancock
back in the Ulster Guard's rear,
Behind the guns on the bluff-top, and
the right of Pickett was near.
What was it that led Gates forward, from
his barricade and shield,
To fulfill, at the one great moment, this
gap in the foremost field?

Till beneath the height at our center,
Pickett had charged with a will;
But he paused at a fence, for shelter,
just at the foot of the hill.
There, over the fence, was a slashing, a
grove that lay felled and dense—
Felled to clear the range for our can-
nons—and this he made a defense.

His hardihood showed his purpose in
striking our right-center line.
The demi-brigade battled fiercely, set
teeth to foil his design
To reach, on the bluff-top, our cannons
and silence them then and there;
But, for guerdon, the enemy's effort had
flagrant loss and despair.

For fate stood over against it, espoused
to the worthier side.
Tho' th' oppressor a while may prosper,
fate ruins him in his pride.
The Proclamation, bringing vict'ry, had
bid that the slaves be free,
And the side of the wronged will tri-
umph, whatever the odds may be.

The desperate onset of Pickett was, thus far, fruitless and bare,
As yet, for the battery'd summit, he had to do and to dare.
The Union troops that opposed him, he outnumbered as six to one ;
But the fewer had cooler courage, and willed to be not outdone.

So the strife for the fence and hillside was stubborn and most severe ;
Both sides knew well that the title to the guns was the question here.
At quarter the range of a pistol the enemy swarmed like bees ;
But he was screened and protected by the fence and the fallen trees.

Then the demi-brigade, throu' the slashing, charged with a right good will,
And they sent up a cheer that gladdened the cannoneers on the hill.
In the fierce, hand-to-hand rencounter, where the thick in the brunt contend,
The enemy's guns played among them, alike on foe and on friend.

But Pickett 's men turned in confusion,
all hindered of their desire,
And into them, whipped and retreating,
Gates volleyed a scathing fire.
The hundreds of prisoners taken, now
seemed the best of the gain ;
But the place of the strife was covered
with rebel wounded and slain.

Give pause for a tear for Baldwin and
weep for them all who died,
In the three days' fight on the ridges,
that the Union might abide ;
For when the gray billow of Pickett fell
wasted back from its strand,
Gates found his own loss in the battle
was more than half his command.

At Gettysburg this charge ended the Ulster Guard 's part in the fight.
The broken Confederate army fled, with
their wounded, at night.
On our troops and those rock-rib'd bulwarks that seem'd for the hour to wait,
Dashed in vain the flood of rebellion :
for the fiat of God is fate.

HEADQUARTERS THIRD DIVISION,
FIRST CORPS,
July 4, 1863.

GENERAL ORDERS.

The Major-General commanding the division desires to return his thanks to the Vermont Brigade, the One Hundred and Fifty-first Pennsylvania Volunteers and the Twentieth New York State Militia, for their gallant conduct in resisting in the front line the main attack of the enemy upon this position, after sustaining a terrific fire from seventy-five to a hundred pieces of artillery. He congratulates them upon contributing so essentially to the glorious, and it is to be hoped, final victory of yesterday.

By Command of

MAJOR-GENERAL DOUBLEDAY.

EDWARD C. BAIRD, Captain and A. A. G.

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